

Keeping Art Alive in Laguna Beach

Laguna Beach's Downtown provides an environment for the variety of art and artists that reside.

By Abby Badrick & Wilder Hope



Gallery viewers observe the work of collage artist Fred Tomaselli in the Laguna Art Museum in Downtown Laguna Beach in Orange County, Calif., on Thurs, Nov. 7, 2024.

When you visit Laguna Beach, you can see art on every block.



Numerous art galleries line the street of South Coast Highway that bisects Downtown Laguna Beach in Orange County, Calif., on Friday, Nov. 15, 2024.

Remnants of Downtown Laguna's [bohemian](#) origins can be found in plain sight - the city embraces architecture of the past, such as [Hotel Laguna](#), constructed in the 1930s, while transforming public spaces into art installations.



The Sight and Sound public art piece completed by artist Raymond Persinger sits over Laguna Beach in Orange County, Calif., on Friday, Nov. 15, 2024.

There is an effort to bridge the gap between art and accessibility, according to Deirdre Murtheh, a Laguna resident of 25 years.

Especially on the first Thursday of every month.

Where the downtown is transformed into an open-air gallery.

“The Laguna Art Walk is an incredible resource for the town of Laguna Beach ... The programs that they have instituted are great,” says Murtheh.



Laguna Beach native Kris Halvorsen, 54, handcrafts a frame for a new installation at Brasa Gallery in Laguna Beach, Calif. on Friday, Nov. 15, 2024

Every first Thursday of the month, the Art Walk provides free admission to forty downtown galleries and transportation via the Laguna Trolley.



Viewers enjoy the art and live music at the Laguna Art Museum during the First Thursdays Art Walk in Downtown Laguna Beach in Orange County, Calif., on Thursday, Nov. 7, 2024.

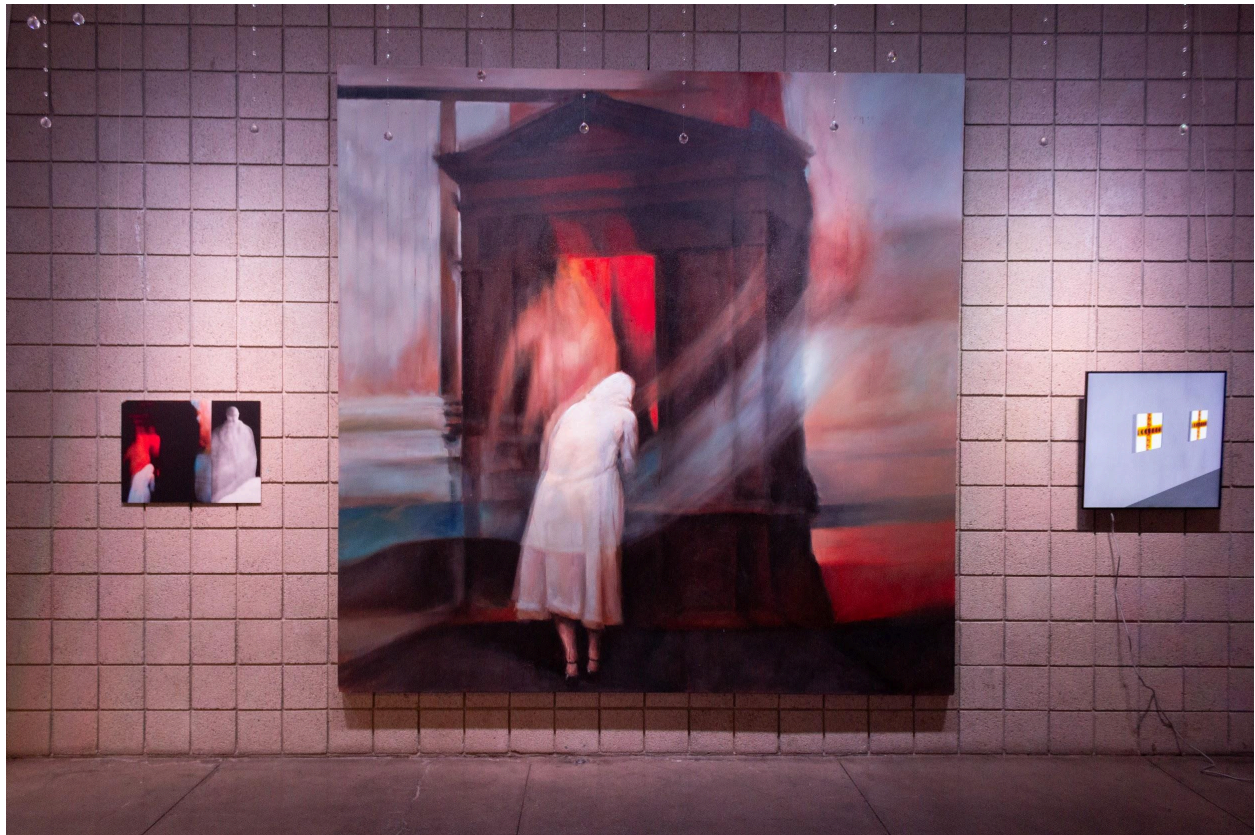
In 1929, the first Laguna art gallery was opened by members of the Laguna Beach Art Association ([LBAA](#)). This original gallery is now a permanent part of the Laguna Art Museum, a centerpiece of the Downtown Laguna art scene and a highlight of the Art Walk.

While the [program](#) has been around since 1998,

It's constantly evolving.

While some of the art spaces are nearing nearly a century, like the [Festival of Arts](#), which takes place during the summer months and celebrates Laguna Beach's unique culture and art scene,

There are some who say change is still at the forefront of the arts.



The mixed media work of artist Jerome Gastaldi, 79, shown during Laguna Beach's First Thursdays Art Walk in Orange County, Calif., on Thursday, Nov. 7, 2024.

“I think it's [Laguna’s art & artists] attempting to move forward and be a little bit more progressive rather than just stagnant ... there's a lot of really good artists, I kinda like to see stuff where it has a little bit of edge to it, and I'm seeing more of that,” local artist Jerome Gastaldi reflects on the current art scene of Downtown Laguna.

Downtown Laguna's scenic positioning and proximity to Los Angeles were utilized during the [1932 Olympics](#) to expand the gallery scene and promote the beauty of Laguna. It has since gained its reputation as a hub for the arts due to its ability to let artists work amongst the natural world.



The famous Laguna Beach lifeguard tower sits at the front of Main Beach as passersby enjoy the scenic Laguna Beach sunset in Orange County, Calif., on Friday, Nov. 15, 2024.

Scattered throughout the downtown are over a hundred pieces of art, making free public art installations easy to come by.



Sukhdev Dail's 2015 sculpture, *Sea Breeze*, located at Heisler Park in Downtown Laguna Beach, Calif., on Friday, Nov. 15, 2024.

Such as the coastal walking path in Heisler Park that takes you past multiple structures, one of the most recognizable being muralist Robert Wylands, ["Whaling Wall 1 - Gray Whale and Calf."](#)

The mural, a life-size depiction of whales, can be found in the parking lot of the historic Hotel Laguna. It is a nod to the migration of gray whales along Laguna's shoreline each year. The piece combines art, history, and public space, ultimately becoming the inspiration for a much larger project - Wyland Whaling Walls. Robert Wyland's venture, Wyland Whaling Walls, consists of the completion of over a hundred large-scale public murals.



The Whaling Wall mural, completed by Robert Wyland, photographed in Downtown Laguna Beach in Orange County, Calif., on Friday, Nov. 15th, 2024.



Jon Seeman's sculpture, *Breaching Whale*, at Heisler Park in Downtown Laguna Beach, Calif., on Friday, Nov. 15, 2024.

If you are in search of art in Downtown Laguna Beach, you will not come up empty-handed.

“Everywhere [in Downtown Laguna] has gotten its own little charms... all different places,”
Megan Allen, Laguna Beach resident and volunteer at the Laguna Art Museum.